

Self Portrait: You and I

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
HAWAII AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

ART

MAY 2018

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I would like to dedicate this work to my family and friends whose trust and support has allowed me to pursue my dreams.

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Practice and Perspective..... | 2 |
| History of wall building..... | 5 |
| Process and Material..... | 7 |
| Precedent and Context..... | 9 |
| Philosophical Context..... | 12 |
| Conclusion..... | 16 |
| | |
| Addendum..... | 18 |
| Technical Notes..... | 20 |
| Bibliography..... | 21 |
| Plates..... | 22 |
| Photo Credits..... | 38 |

“Self Portrait: You and I”

Introduction

The 21st century offers us a wide range of innovative new methods of communication, conducting research, building capital, and expressing creativity. These technologies have permeated nearly all aspects of everyday life and dominate the ways we receive information, socialize, and create. Through the glass screens of our televisions, computers, and cellular devices we construct our realities and portray ourselves via their networks. More and more we are moving away from the sources of actual physical experiences and into a larger continuum of isolated and virtual experiences.

My Master of Fine Art degree thesis exhibition, titled “Self Portrait: You and I”, consists of a sculptural cast glass brick wall that measures 7’ high and 14’ long. (Plate 1) The sculpture is an investigation of the mechanisms of social construction, identity, ideology and the systems that control how they emerge and can be exploited. The title of my work represents my effort to capture the present socio-political moment as a sculpture. I see the work as a reflection of my experience in navigating contemporary culture. The title is also meant to suggest a relationship or communication between at least two parties on either side of the wall.

As far back as I can remember there have been ongoing struggles both domestically and internationally. The year I graduated from high school, the first class of the new millennia, was when the world witnessed the events of 9/11 and the rise of the “terrorism”. This was also the same time social media platforms were taking off right alongside the rise of the reality television star. Currently, there is a former reality television figure occupying the highest seat in the American government (Donald Trump, 45th president). Political systems are crumbling and nuclear armament is back on the rise. For instance, on January 13th, 2018, there was a “mistake” made here in Hawai’i involving a mass message sent out over cellular communication networks alerting residents across the state to an incoming ballistic missile. This frightening event was partly made possible due to thousands of smart devices with glass screens. I was on campus when I received the alert and it took over 30 minutes for the false alarm message to appear on Twitter. It is certainly a cause for concern and a poignant example of the current political

climate. Even being on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean thousands of miles from anything doesn't ensure safety in light of current international relations.

Rather than finding common ground we can all stand on, the media sells us fear, anxiety, and violence that are amplified by the immediacy of communication. These in turn facilitate more divisiveness and unrest. It seems we are always anxiously on the brink of something out of our control. I see the wall's transparency and the immaterial quality of the cast glass brick as a metaphor for the times in which I am currently living and also as an investigation into how glass has played a role as a tool for communication in contemporary society. "Self Portrait: You and I" is about miscommunication and never being able to quite experience another's reality. It is about my personal experience as a graduate student, and the transition to an academic "Master of Fine Art". It is about confronting the issues of today in order to address them head on. I'm interested in how shared assumptions about reality are influenced by the media along with how a change in material and creating a wall out of a transparent material like glass, might skew our typical understanding about these assumptions.

Practice and Perspective

As an artist, I feel an obligation to strive for a panoptic¹ view of the things around me. For me, it is important to cast a wide net to find my place in the world so that I can visually represent my experience. My practice involves observing the relationships between objects, as well as relationships between people, and interactions between the two. The idea of an artistic practice has been a topic of discussion for many years now. Due in part to artists such as Jackson Pollock and his drip painting method, as well as Marcel Duchamp and the proliferation of the readymade, there is generally less focus on object making and more focus on the context. More recently, the social aspect of artistic endeavors has also become an important issue. In his 1998 book *Relational Aesthetics*, curator and art critic Nicolas Bourriaud describes this theory as follows, "A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."² These words resonate with me and compelled me to make art work

¹ Panoptic: being or presenting a comprehensive or panoramic view

² Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. Les Presses du Réel, 2010. page 113

derived from my own experiences with regard to relationships with others. “Self Portrait: You and I” activated and exposed elements of these relationships and provided a new context in which to think about them. (Plate 2) Minimalist artist Sol LeWitt describes his practice as follows, “The aim of the artist would not be to instruct the viewer but to give him information. Whether the viewer understands this information is incidental to the artist; he cannot foresee the understanding of all his viewers. He would follow his predetermined premise to its conclusion avoiding subjectivity. The serial artist does not attempt to produce a beautiful or mysterious object but functions merely as a clerk cataloguing the results of his premise.”³ I tend to agree with LeWitt and do not consider my practice as a means of providing any sort of truth to viewers. Being naturally curious about the way things work, I tend to ask questions about what might typically be considered truth rather than accept it at face value. For this particular project, I did feel like a “clerk”, not only cataloguing the results of my own premise, but also the results of living in contemporary society. While it was unclear how viewers would react to “Self Portrait: You and I”, I felt I had to make the work based on my own experience regardless of how others might perceive it. (Plate 3)

I think it is important to take on the challenging issues, examine what might be considered obnoxious or unpleasant, and find a way to re-present them in a new manner. Donald Trump’s promise of building a wall between the United States and Mexico being just one example. The concern is not only to create something aesthetically relevant, but also to create something that is engaging and relatable. My goal is to create art work that connects movements between historical and contemporary conditions, between simple daily life and paradigm-shifting thought or action. One of my inspirations is acclaimed painter Robert Rauschenberg, who studied under Joseph Albers at Black Mountain college, where he says he learned to do the exact opposite of what he was instructed to do. His “White Painting” (1951), which depicts empty white space or voids on canvas, is meant to allow viewers to bring their own experiences to the work and become active participants. (Plate 4) Along with John Cage, one of the pioneering avant-garde artists of the 1950’s and 1960’s, who was inspired by his friend and colleague Rauschenberg’s aforementioned paintings in 1952 to create “4’33””. In this work, people gathered for a musical concert expecting a typical experience similar to other musical events. There was a piano on stage and when the musician came out, he sat down as if to play and

³ LeWitt, Sol. *Serial Project #I*, 1966. Aspen 5/6 (Fall/Winter 1967)

simply rested and turned the pages of the score in time. Instead of piano music, all that could be heard was the rain on the roof and the voices of the audience. (Plate 5) Both works were subject to criticism initially and have now found a home in the texts on art history. This is not because they were “beautiful” but, rather, because of the discourse that surrounded them, and what they revealed about those who witnessed the work. Previously, no one had this kind of experience where the viewer was not privy to an aesthetic experience per-se but rather becomes a “participant” in the work.

In our contemporary life, especially urban life, we are surrounded by walls and our access/mobility are regulated through the built environment. Other less-tangible walls include ideas concerning social mobility and the constraints of a consumer-based economy. All of us at some point will face difficult decisions where we feel helpless and unable to make any real change in this world. It is up to each of us to decide how we will deal with such situations. An artist is someone who constantly takes risks and this is the avenue I'm pursuing to formulate my response to the world. Currently, I am separated from my home by thousands of miles of ocean, embedded in an unfamiliar culture, and without access to the resources I'm accustomed to. In my case it was a choice that I made, inspired by an opportunity to gain a new broader view in pursuit of a graduate degree. I use my work to confront these challenges and in doing so, strive to gain a new perspective.

“Self Portrait: You and I” uses the form of a wall to denote several concepts, including the ability to control access and as a tool of oppression. The work is intended as a static object that promotes movement among viewers. (Plate 6) It is designed to encourage viewers to spend time looking and, hopefully, touch viewers emotionally. Visibility and movement are not restricted from either side and because it is made of glass, details may be viewed through the glass bricks from either side. (Plate 7) I created a wall with the aim of breaking down the typical ideologies associated with such an object or experience. This sculpture is also meant to act as the genesis for a new understanding of the obstacles we face and encourage discussion, reflection, and contemplation. We stand a better chance of overcoming obstacles together as opposed to trying to do it alone or focusing on trying to assign blame.

It seems controversial to build a wall after the 2016 presidential election cycle. (Plate 8) During one of the most polarized political environments in recent history, the transparent quality of glass is appropriate because it implies that it is possible for parties on either side of the wall to

interact. As our global community becomes more divided over identity politics and other social constructions, we need more transparency and collegiality. It's healthy for a society to have opposing viewpoints and opinions, but with our heavy reliance on technology it is easy to forget that at the other end of the conversation is another human being. Although life in the 21st century tends to focus on individualism and consumption, I still believe that there are experiences we all have in common.

History of wall building:

Humans have been building walls throughout history. Whether ancient civilizations were utilizing natural walls such as mountain ranges and bodies of water, or those that they constructed, they have always been at the most basic level, a form of communication. Walls are constructed for defensive purposes, making it clear that this is an insular community, or as a projection of power. The Great Wall of China served multiple functions at the time of its construction. Not only was it meant to keep out invaders, it also served as a symbol of national identity unifying the country. Walls can also be sites of social and cultural exchange, such as the Western/Wailing Wall or the Maya Lin's Vietnam War Memorial, to which people often undertake personal pilgrimages. "In addition to the brute walls of fortresses and settler cities, less obvious, invisible, conceptual walls partition the planet into so many territories, regulating the movements of people and resources. Manifesting itself in the transient front-line and the phalanx of soldiers, the wall also materializes in the imaginary boundary lines of maps, not to mention in computer programs and in the inverted, negative form of the trench."⁴ People create metaphorical walls in human relationships and portrayals of identity both in person and digitally. All of these different characteristics provide opportunities for exploration within the realm of art.

Right now, the socially constructed narratives surrounding the concept of the "wall" have become embedded in the media and minds of many throughout the world with an emphasis on border walls between countries. Globally, there are now more boarder walls than ever before along with massive numbers of displaced human beings. There were upwards of 65 million

⁴ Sperber, Elliot. "The Concept of the Wall." *Truthout*, 21 Jan. 2017, www.truthout.org/news/item/39140-the-concept-of-the-wall

displaced persons in 2015 alone according to United Nations reports with Syria, Afghanistan, and Somalia producing half of the world's refugees⁵. Unfortunately, it is estimated that half of these refugees are children most likely separated from their parents. As a headline from "Daily Mail", a British newspaper states, "How 65 countries have erected fences on their borders—four times as many as when the Berlin Wall was toppled—as governments try to hold back the tide of migrants."⁶

In the United States the current focus is once again on the border with Mexico. While the idea of a border wall between Mexico and the United States is nothing new, President, Donald Trump has stated that completion of the wall is one of his top priorities. Construction originally began in 1994 as part of a plan to cut down on the number of drugs entering the United States from Latin America. One of the more significant efforts came in 2006 with the "Secure Fence Act", which passed in the Senate with a vote of 80-19. This in turn authorized and funded 700 miles of physical fence/barriers on border between the United States and Mexico. President Trump has signed an executive order to begin "immediate" construction of the border wall. Considered by some to be a move to block immigrants and illegal drugs from coming into the United States, others argue that it is an attempt to consolidate a national identity. For me personally, I do not need a wall on the border to form my identity as an American. Regardless, despite past and current efforts, all walls are permeable in the end. People, drugs, war, diseases, and other concerns will still manage to breach any kind of wall.

Through a seemingly never-ending barrage of "othering" or categorizing others as less than or desirable, humankind has failed thus far to reach a mutual understanding. Pushing past our walls and being able to interact with others who may have different experiences from our own is crucial in order for us to move forward as successful societies. In "Self Portrait: You and I", the sculpture does not impair the view from either side. By simply circumnavigating the sculpture, what may not be visible at first can become much clearer. It is my goal that the

⁵ "Unprecedented' 65 million people displaced by war and persecution in 2015 – UN | Refugees and Migrants." *United Nations*, United Nations, 20 June 2016, refugeesmigrants.un.org/%E2%80%98unprecedented%E2%80%99-65-million-people-displaced-war-and-persecution-2015-%E2%80%93-un

⁶ MailOnline, Simon Tomlinson for. "World of walls: How 65 countries have erected fences on their borders – four times as many as when the Berlin Wall was toppled – as governments try to hold back the tide of migrants." *Daily Mail Online*, Associated Newspapers, 22 Aug. 2015, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3205724/How-65-countries-erected-security-walls-borders.html

immaterial nature of glass will explode the typical socially constructed notion of what a wall represents. Rather than its primary function being to define space or as a mechanism of control/power, it functions more as a departure point for discussion and/or quiet reflection.

Process and Material

The building of a glass brick wall might appear simple on the surface. In actuality, it required much more rigor to complete than anticipated. The sheer weight of this object alone required consultation with a structural engineer to determine the feasibility and safety concerns. I had to use models and learn new software in order to produce digital renderings in three dimensions. The models were then sent to an engineer to ensure that the piece would not become a safety hazard. (Plate 9) For this project, molten glass is poured directly into two part welded steel brick molds. (Plate 10) Once annealed, these bricks are then laid to construct the larger system or sculpture. The piece is made up of over 700 cast bricks and weighs in at over 4,500 pounds. This weight does not include any of the required metal support structure for the piece. The project also involved a lot of hard labor and logistics—organizing the different tasks and teaching a voluntary force of undergraduate students about the process and how it functions for this particular work. (Plate 11) Coming from a blue-collar background, hard work and intense labor are both an important part of the way I approach my creative practice. For the volunteers, I instructed them on what was necessary to achieve desirable results and also explained my thoughts behind the work. This project provided many of them with a rare opportunity to get involved with a larger project, much different from what they are used to working on. However, I'm certain that everyone, myself included, benefitted from this shared experience.

Moving forward from the post-industrial era, there have been dramatic changes in artistic production. One only needs to ask who is it that owns the art of the world or point to the corporate sponsorships with art museums to realize the impact of globalization. Ernest Mandel, Marxist economist and author of over 30 books describes the effects of capitalism as follows, “Mechanization, standardization, over-specialization and parcelization of labor, which in the past determined only the realm of commodity production in actual industry, now penetrate into all sectors of social life. The profitability of universities, music academies and museums starts to be

calculated in the same way as that of brick works.”⁷ While creating “Self Portrait: You and I” everyone had a certain specialized job they performed as part of a team. While it is unclear to me whether the finished result can be considered a “commodity”, it was certainly produced in a factory-like manner.

I believe that in order to fully express yourself it is necessary to redefine the boundaries, and push yourself as hard as you can physically and mentally. “Self Portrait: You and I” acts as a kind of boundary in that it is that largest construction I have ever created and involved inviting others to participate in the process. The project can also be seen as a “terminus” because it is one of my final degree requirements. Working on a small island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean with no glass industry, this project pushed the limits of the material available here in Hawai’i. Usually my work involves using the material on a much smaller scale and through different processes. I found casting to be the most efficient means to address my concept here at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa. While the recycled glass used resulted in some dark blue bricks, the finished work is still translucent. This wall is not meant to be a shield or deterrent and will not keep anything or anyone out. Rather, this wall invites all to participate and discuss how this type of object is interpreted in current times. As in Plato’s “Dialogues”, truth exists not on one side or the other but in between. It will exist as a temporary site-specific installation and not a permanent fixture. It is through the involvement of the community that this project even becomes a reality. Its raw essence will be that of an object in space. It will not harm anyone, has no real ideological structure or feelings, and although it exists and will reflect what viewers bring to it, there is no narrative. Instead it will function as an empty vessel—waiting to be filled up by any ideologies viewers might bring with them. For me it is about confronting uncomfortable issues and using my own experiences to create a sculpture that effectively uses the material as part of the content.

In *Making Not Knowing*, Ann Hamilton says, “You may set out to make a sculpture and find that time is your material. You may pick up a paintbrush and find that your making is not on canvas or wood but in relations between people. You may set out to walk across the room, but getting to what is on the other side might take ten years. You have to be open to all possibilities

⁷ Mandel, Ernest. *Late Capitalism*. Verso, 1999

and to all routes—circuitous or otherwise.”⁸ For me, art making is a way to examine my relationship to the world and participate in the indefinable in terms of language. If you were to ask ten different people what the definition of art is, you will probably receive ten different responses. The task is not to figure out what a given concept means in and of itself, or what the truth is in this or that, but to get closer to the concept, experiment with it and, hopefully, come to a new understanding of it. While most people have their own ideas about walls, I believe I am presenting a different kind of experience. “Self Portrait: You and I” has expanded the way I think about identity, communication, power systems, and the impact of the primary attributes of glass. In the past, it was important to me to try and keep politics out of my work, however, for “Self Portrait: You and I” it was important that I faced it directly. I chose to use this opportunity to go beyond myself and try to change how things are perceived. Renowned designer and founder of “Massive Change Network” and the “Institute Without Boundaries” Bruce Mau mentions something in the essay “Radical Agency-Massive Change” rather simply and beautifully. “I think we underestimate how important art is. If you could put everyone in society through art school, think about how different it would be to have a general population that understands culture and embraces the capacity of art to affect the way we see the world.”⁹ I used the material in a way that is atypical of studio glass artists, in an effort to test the capacity of art to engage with contemporary issues concerning the ideological role of a wall. I exhausted all of the resources that were provided to me to create this sculpture. I am using the material in a way that highlights itself. Not as a monument for stifling access or the exchange of ideas, but rather as a catalyst by providing access and promoting discourse.

Precedent and Context

Inspired by the work of American minimalist sculptor Richard Serra, who is known for his large-scale wall-like sculptures, “Self Portrait: You and I” is an attempt to enter into a dialogue with certain notions he presents in his work. In 1981, Serra installed his public funded work “Tilted Arc” (Plate 12), which was commissioned by the General Services Administration

⁸ Jacob, Mary Jane., et al. *Learning Mind: Experience into Art*. School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009

⁹ Jacob, Mary Jane., et al. *Learning Mind: Experience into Art*. School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2009

(GSA) at 26 Federal Plaza in Lower Manhattan. “Tilted Arc” consisted of Cor-Ten steel that was 120 feet long and 12 feet tall. The sculpture was 2.5 inches thick and weighed roughly 15 tons. Without all of the typical artistic hallmarks of conventional sculpture, the public had a hard time interpreting the meaning of the piece and disputes arose involving the possible impact of the sculpture on access routes. There was a public hearing held to determine the fate of the sculpture and despite an overwhelming majority vote to keep the sculpture, it was removed in 1989. Serra has since gone on to create a number of similar sculptures, some of which are indoors (e.g., “Torqued Ellipse”) and shown in museums worldwide. He is considered to be one of America’s preeminent sculptors, adding to the overall discourse on sculpture and ideas about public space and site specificity. “Self Portrait: You and I” is my investigation into what sculpture means from my experiences, how it can function, and how public space has been dominated by new technology and social constructions.

Richard Serra’s “Tilted Arc” comes shortly after the advent of minimalism, which developed out of the turbulent 60’s culture. Using industrial and commercial processes and materials, the movement subverted the traditional functions of the very same materials and processes. In essence, artists stole the language of the powers that be in order to critique the ideas of consumerism and capitalism with simplified forms and visuals. These ideas still provide discourse today. As the divide widens and the grip of corporations and government continues to tighten, “Tilted Arc”, non-existent and created over 35 years ago, still resonates with me. From my own experience, I consider the culture of today to be just as turbulent as the 60’s, if not more so. “Self Portrait: You and I” is also an attempt to use the language of those in power to provide a new experience and to create discourse.

The discussions surrounding the piece indicate that Serra intentionally negated the openness of the plaza, expressing the division of power in a physical sense. This plaza included the Jacob Javits Federal Building that housed the court of international trade along with other government offices in a building across the plaza. Serra was attempting to force viewers to engage with the massive and unavoidable structure. Using raw steel with a natural rusty patina, referencing the structures in the plaza, I believe Serra tried to draw attention to the systems that control our lives. It is also a testament of sorts of Serra’s belief in the honesty of materials. In a world that is becoming more and more artificial, material investigations can connect the present

moment of cloud computing and bright flashing lights to the more rudimentary production of the past. While the work brings forth questions on government funding and authorship, Serra says, “I don’t think it is the function of art to be pleasing, Art is not democratic. It is not for the people.”¹⁰ Rather than providing new views of the landscape in which it inhabited, Serra’s sculpture largely blocked the view. “Self Portrait: You and I” revisits some of the ideas initiated by Serra but uses a different material and construction method that I feel is more in line with my premise. These changes further explore the underlying mechanics of how certain systems of power, control, identity function and our relationship to the ideology behind the wall.

I recently discovered the work of American artist Pae White, whose practice merges art, design and craft into the making of ephemeral objects and installations. The gallery 1301PE, that shows White’s work in Los Angeles, describes it as follows, “White’s prolific and diverse oeuvre focuses on the forgotten, the fleeting and ephemeral of everyday life. Exploring different material forms and contexts, White’s practice is known for blurring the traditional and often nebulous boundaries between the fine and applied arts, architecture and design. Whether in the form of sculpture, site-specific installations, tapestries, animation, or painting, White’s works, (such as “Qwalala” which was shown at the 2017 Venice Biennial,) subverts viewers’ expected relationship to familiar objects, processes and spaces.”¹¹ While mostly known for being a fiber/installation artist, for “Qwalala” she sub-contracted Poesia Glass Studio in the Veneto region of Italy create the hand cast glass bricks. White also had the bricks laid out to form a wall, twisting in a serpentine like manner over 75 meters (Plate 13). According to the architecture and design publication “Domus”, “The title of the piece, “Qwalala”, is a Native American Pomo word meaning “coming down water place”. It references the meandering flow of the Gualala river in Northern California, which the work echoes in both its structure and layout.”¹² While the context of our work is different, I found it interesting that there was someone else exploring glass along similar lines and using it as a building material. There is an interesting synergy between White’s work and my own in that in both pieces, half of the bricks

¹⁰ “Richard Serra's Tilted Arc.” *PBS, Public Broadcasting Service*, www.pbs.org/wgbh/cultureshock/flashpoints/visualarts/tiltedarc_a.html

¹¹ “PAE WHITE.” *1301PE*, www.1301pe.com/pae-white

¹² “Pae White: Qwalala.” *Domus*, 19 May 2017, www.domusweb.it/en/news/2017/05/19/pae_white_qwalala.html

are clear and half are colored. White's work has over twenty-six variations of color all selected from a digital palette of thousands of options offered to her by the studio. In each of White's colored bricks there is, "a "storm"-like effect of swirling color."¹³ The colored bricks in "Self Portrait: You and I" are a result of not having an unlimited supply of clear glass and having to melt recycled glass that had been stored in barrels behind the university's studio. Largely as a result of budgetary constraints, I was unable to purchase the material outright to make the whole wall from clear glass.

Born in 1981, Filipino artist Maria Taniguchi focuses on natural phenomena and the myriad of transformations that take place before they become useful. Although she is known for her sculptures, installations, and videos, she has been focusing on paintings of bricks for over a decade now. The use of scale in her work allows for a scaling-up or scaling-down of the perspective of the viewers. The works are the result of a decade long pursuit of the uncreative, unexpressive, and mundane. In an interview with *Art Asia Pacific* Taniguchi states, "These paintings take time and help me regulate my own production, my thinking. They set the tone for the rest of my work."¹⁴ While we are working in different mediums, the repetitive nature of the production of "Self Portrait: You and I" also offered a space for reflection on the process. I can see this process with glass leading to future investigations. The brick has been utilized as a unit of construction for both Taniguchi and myself, I think this evokes a time-consuming and labor-intensive process in both works of art. (Plate 14) Both pieces seem to confront how manual undertakings might be overlooked in contemporary culture. The lengthy process for Taniguchi serves as a device to comment on the undervaluing of labor in Southeast Asia. In "Self Portrait: You and I", the labor is certainly on the surface and without the group of students who willingly volunteered their time to help, this project would never have been possible to create.

¹³ "Qwalala by Pae White." *Fondazione Giorgio Cini Onlus*, 12 May 2017, www.cini.it/en/events/qwalala-by-pae-white

¹⁴ Sahakian, Marlyne. "Where I Work: Maria Taniguchi," *ArtAsiaPacific*, June 25, 2013: <http://artasiapacific.com/Blog/WhereIWorkMariaTaniguchi>.

Philosophical Context
Brick Concept/Nomad Thought

The book *A Thousand Plateaus* written in 1980 by Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, French psychoanalyst and philosopher, teaches us that progressive or “nomad” thinking is not just relegated to philosophy. As a glassmaker, for example, it is possible to demonstrate philosophical thinking to the extent that one explores the potential of the material and breaks away from the standard model put forth by our institutions and laws. In the translator’s forward Brian Massumi describes “nomadic” thought as not situating itself upon identity; it does not respect the artificially constructed divisions but is immersed in a state of change. Guattari and Deleuze also wrote that, “A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window. What is the subject of the brick? The arm that throws it? The body connected to the arm? The brain encased in the body? The situation that brought brain and body to such a juncture? All and none of the above. What is its object? The window? The edifice? The laws the edifice shelters? The class and other power relations encrusted in the laws? All and none of the above. What interests us are the circumstances. Because the concept in its unrestrained usage is a set of circumstances, at a volatile juncture. It is a vector: the point of application of a force moving through a space at a given velocity in a given direction. The concept has no subject or object other than itself. It is an act.”¹⁵

I found this idea both liberating and confining. I started to think about what Guattari and Deleuze were referring to when they said, “It is an act.” To me this touches on the complex interplay of systems and subjectivity and provides a setting from which a project such as “Self Portrait: You and I” could be impactful. Inspired by the aforementioned passage, I have literally created glass bricks and assembled them into a wall—not to be thrown or to define reason, but rather to question the current moment. Through this action, I created an opportunity for viewers to have a shared experience, find common ground, and question the truth of what a wall might represent.

¹⁵ Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007 (Page 13)

Inside vs Outside:

There are what I'll call "inside" and "outside" attributes to our everyday experience based largely on the Foucauldian model. One example is the perception of race and gender identities. While I am perceived as a privileged white male on the exterior, on the inside, I might not associate with all of the cultural definitions assigned to white males. I'm not a landowner and there is no great inheritance in my future. As the son of a blue-collar automotive worker, growing up in the Midwest, my experience has taught me that I will only succeed through hard work. Unlike many of people I grew up with, I left home in pursuit of an advanced degree. My younger brother Daniel, currently works in a factory that produces industrial diamonds for the mining industry, just as myself and countless others in the Midwest have also spent countless hours laboring in factories. I modeled the glass bricks after the classic red ceramic bricks used commonly in Midwestern architecture for factories and urban neighborhoods, such as the one I grew up in. The factory-like production of "Self Portrait: You and I" is also an effort to investigate class separation and concepts of upward mobility linked to my identity and background.

Whether it is the public vs. the private, self vs. the other, these dichotomies are ripe with creative experimental potential. The artistic process I have been engaged with over the last few years has often involved the "inside" and "outside" dichotomy with occasionally chaotic results. Over the course of my studies, these ideas resonated with me. In another series of work, I experimented with using imagery behind glass rods (a.k.a. "canes"). (Plate 15) The round solid glass canes magnify and distort anything placed behind them. These projects stem from the idea that in modern society we have access to an almost limitless database of information through the glass screens of our televisions, computers, and other communication technology, and yet, often the quality of the information is magnified or distorted. Relying on the use of the transparent quality of glass as a tool for examining media and other contemporary conditions.

Pawel Wojtas, adjunct professor of English literature and history at the University of Warsaw writes, "The symbolism and significance of the liminal, the threshold where extraordinary transformation occurs, is pervasive. Those with the temperament, skills or stamina to traverse the threshold, to withstand the uncertainty of this purgatory limbo; those willing to risk diving into the chaos of the primordial stew will, if all goes well, emerge transformed and

enlightened.”¹⁶ The concept of the threshold arises from the ashes of French social theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault who examined the relationships between knowledge and power through the lenses of Structuralist and Poststructuralist theory. Many would argue that the ideas of “inside” and “outside” are rooted in his writings. In ‘Madness and Civilization’ he explains how the systems of power, largely the state apparatuses, need to separate the ‘mad’ or abnormal from the “normal”, in order to define itself and enforce its power. Only by controlling the abnormal can the normal exist. In “Discipline and Punish” the concept of the ‘panopticon’ is discussed at great length as another device of control enacted by the state. Through the partitioning of space, it perfects the operations of power by increasing the number of people who can be controlled, and decreasing the number needed to operate it. It gives power over people's minds through architecture by physically separating each individual into cells under the watch of a central power, where it is uncertain whether those in the cells are being observed. It is the perception of these partitions, thresholds, and systems of power that I am trying to engage with, and possibly alter, through “Self Portrait: You and I”. While engaging the political in my work is something new, as is working at such a large scale, I am confident in the capacity of the material to transmit these ideas.

The Spectacle

The introduction of Guy Debord as a French writer, philosopher and filmmaker associated with the creating of the Situationist International, a group of avant-garde artists and other intellectuals had a profound impact on my way of thinking. Central to the Situationist theory is the idea of the “spectacle”, a means of social critique of capitalism. In the first chapter of Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, he describes different apparatus through which he believes modern society is being manipulated. The following is a point from the first chapter, “In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation.”¹⁷ While I can relate to what Debord is alluding to, I’m more interested in what might exist outside of the spectacle. Throughout the book Debord describes a world where every

¹⁶ Wojtas, Pawel. *Translating Gombrowicz's Liminal Aesthetics*. Peter Lang, 2014

¹⁷ Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Black & Red, 1977

human experience has been captured or generated by the media. These experiences are then viewed through glass screens of televisions, computers, cellular phones, and other communication devices. In the current landscape, much of our identity is constructed through these images and representation via social media outlets and personal communication advances. It's almost as if there may not be any genuine experiences to be had or the digital has more to offer. I believe "Self Portrait: You and I" could be a vehicle for such a direct shared and authentic experience. It exists as a physical object, not a digital representation, in a public space where viewers can experience it directly.

Conclusion

"Self Portrait: You and I" is powerless, not meant to prevent anything in particular and people can even walk around it if they choose. An object such as this does not have its own distinct history attached; it is merely an emergent process of certain experiences and locations. This piece was partially inspired by the experience of moving to Hawai'i and all of the unrest since the 2016 election. What effect does "Self Portrait: You and I" have on the operations of power? Having this structure normally meant to control space, created from a material normally thought to be dangerous or brittle as well as transparent goes against the normal paradigm of stability or permanence. It is not a duplicate of architectures perceived permanence, rather it alludes to the void that is left behind after everything else has worn away. Bourriaud beautifully states in the book *The Exform* (2016), "The central political task of contemporary art does not involve denouncing any current "political" fact in particular. Instead, the point is to bring precariousness to mind: to keep the notion alive that intervention in the world is possible, to propagate the creative potential of human existence in all its forms."¹⁸ It is my hope that "Self Portrait: You and I" will inspire courage among those currently facing obstacles and showcase the beauty of hard work and going against the standard model of contemporary culture. The sculpture is intended to act as a "détournement" or a means of rerouting the socially constructed

¹⁸ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *The Exform*. Verso, 2016. (Page 43).

ideas about what a wall can be, in a sense turning the expressions of capitalism and other systems of power against themselves. It is easy to get lost in the array of multiplicities of the world, to feel as if nothing we do will ever make a difference. However, it is possible for small communities such as those that aided in this project and individuals to shift the norms no matter how impossible it may seem.

It is only through the viewer's experience that "Self Portrait: You and I" will become activated. The piece does not divide the space and stands freely, allowing viewers to easily move around it. It is made of a transparent material that does not control the gaze the same way a stone or concrete wall would. All of these qualities are counter to the typical experience of walls portrayed within the spectacle of popular culture and the media. As we are constantly reforming our own identities based on experiences we have and the images we see, those that view this work will now have this as part of their catalog of experiences. The next time they encounter such an object, perhaps they will proceed differently. Regardless of what your experience has led you to believe, what social constructions you hold to be relevant, whether you consider yourself to be on the "inside" or "outside", you and I both exist on this planet together.

Addendum

In the final construction, a 4ft x 14ft x $\frac{1}{4}$ " hot rolled steel plate was used for the base to aid in dispersing the overall weight. A 14ft x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " channel for the bottom created by welding two lengths of 2" and 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " angle iron together. During the attachment of the bottom channel to the base I encountered a slight warping of the base plate. In the future, I would reinforce the base with structural steel to not only prevent warping but also to prevent deflection of the glass wall when the full load is applied. The vertical and top channels of the steel frame we also fabricated in the same manner from the combination of 2" and 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " angle iron, total channel length for the entire frame ended up being 42ft. For attaching the vertical members and top to the frame, holes were tapped and died, and $\frac{1}{2}$ " stainless steel machine screws were used to affix the components together.

A team of volunteer students helped lay the bricks into the fabricated steel frame. An industrial glazing adhesive, Dow Corning 1199, was used to not only adhere the bricks to one another but to provide a cushion as to prevent glass on glass contact. A total of 24 10.3 fluid ounce tubes were used in the construction. We also used small rubber tile spacers not only to maintain the proper clearances between the different courses of bricks but these also aided in preventing pressure points and maintaining a plumb construction. It took 5 solid days of working in the gallery to get all of the bricks laid and the top channel bolted on. Finding a level surface large enough proved to be quite the task, once all of the bricks had been placed inside of the frame, there were minor modifications needed in order for the top piece of the frame to fit properly. I decided to leave the frame in its raw state rather than painting or applying another finish. I felt as if this made a more direct reference to Serra's work and also highlighted the impact such an image has in contemporary society.

In the end, the work had an organic water-like aesthetic due to the colors produced by the recycling process. I had originally envisioned the work created entirely out of clear glass but due to budgetary constraints I had to work with what I had. The colored bricks actually added to the work, evoking feelings of water and ice. Early on in my graduate career I was having a hard time, Rick Mills said to me, “the ocean is kind of like a glass wall,” this stuck with me and was a big influence for this sculpture. Having the darker colors on the bottom, different mid-range values in the middle and clear on the top, gave the work a more weighted feeling. The color and other indeterminate factors ended up working out in my favor, having bricks of slightly different dimensions, along with the way the bricks were laid out, caused a slight wave or curve lending itself to a more handmade/organic quality.

I do plan on installing the work elsewhere. The weight and scale might limit me somewhat in terms of the venues available, there are spaces which could accommodate the work. I would love to find a permanent space for the work, either as a public work or as an architectural installation. I also think it would be interesting to install and document it in different locations outside in different environments. I think the work addresses a contemporary topic and could fit in the context of group exhibitions should the opportunity arise.

For the dismantling, I used a wire saw, clay wire tool, and razor knives to take it apart in sections. Roughly 100lbs each, these sections are then crated with ¼” inch play laid between each layer. The hope is that by numbering the sections should an opportunity to show the work again arise, it will be easy to reinstall the work as close as possible to the original realization of the sculpture. The crated glass bricks and steel frame components are to be loaded on to a cargo container and shipped to the mainland for storage.

This project has also helped me develop my own ideas and identity as an artist. In a capitalist system where economic globalization has in some ways turned everything into capital, including human beings, I strongly believe that as an artist it is my job to think about art as something that goes beyond the standard way of operating. I do not think art should be treated as a commodity, but rather as a tool for cataloguing, reflecting, and experimenting beyond the standard operations. I think art should expose the precarious nature of moments in which it is created, and should strive to showcase the ability of people to have affective change, to provide new ways of seeing and new ways of being.

Technical Notes

Adhesive:

For “Self Portrait: You and I” I used an industrial glazing adhesive. The product that was used was the Dow Corning 1199 silicone glazing sealant purchased from Bonded Materials. Special attention was paid to the durometer and tensile strength as per the consultation with a structural engineer. After researching multiple adhesive options, the Dow Corning 1199 product was decided as the best fit for this particular application. The following is a link to the product specifications, http://www.bondedmaterials.net/assets/data/dow_corning_1199.pdf. (Plate 16)

Molds:

I created a total of six 2-part steel molds for the production of the cast glass bricks. The two “L” shaped halves fit together to give the inner brick shape. The molds were fabricated out of half inch steel with an inner dimension of 8” x 4” x 2 ½”. Having multiple molds allowed for rapid production of similarly sized bricks each having to be quenched with water between each use.

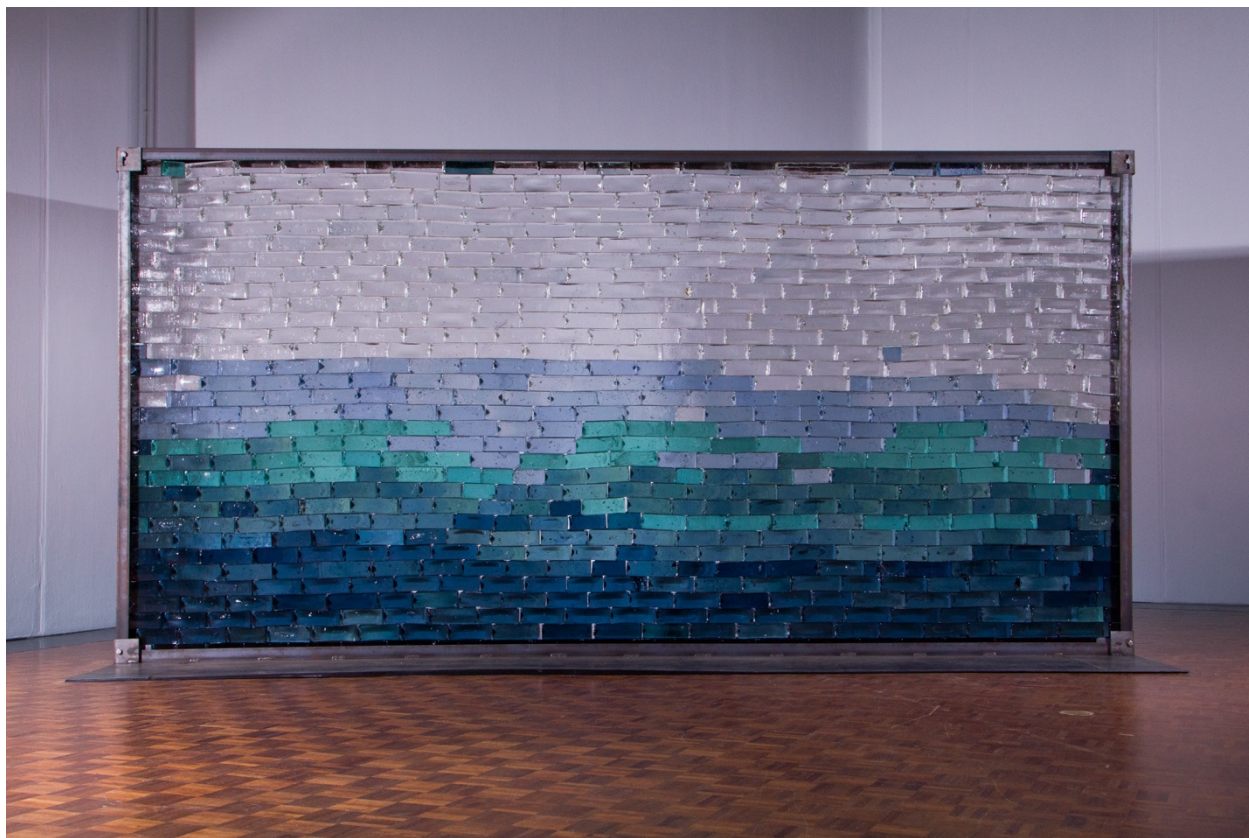
Annealing:

The glass bricks were annealed or slowly cooled as to prevent cracking and breakage. This process involves loading the cast bricks into an oven and slowly cooling them down to room temperature over a certain period of time. The schedule used was as follow: 12 hour soak at 960 degrees (Fahrenheit), 24 hours down to 810 degrees, a 6 hour hold at 810 degrees, followed by 24hrs down to 150 degrees.

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Plate 1



“Self Portrait: You and I” 7ft x 14ft (Front View)

Plate 2



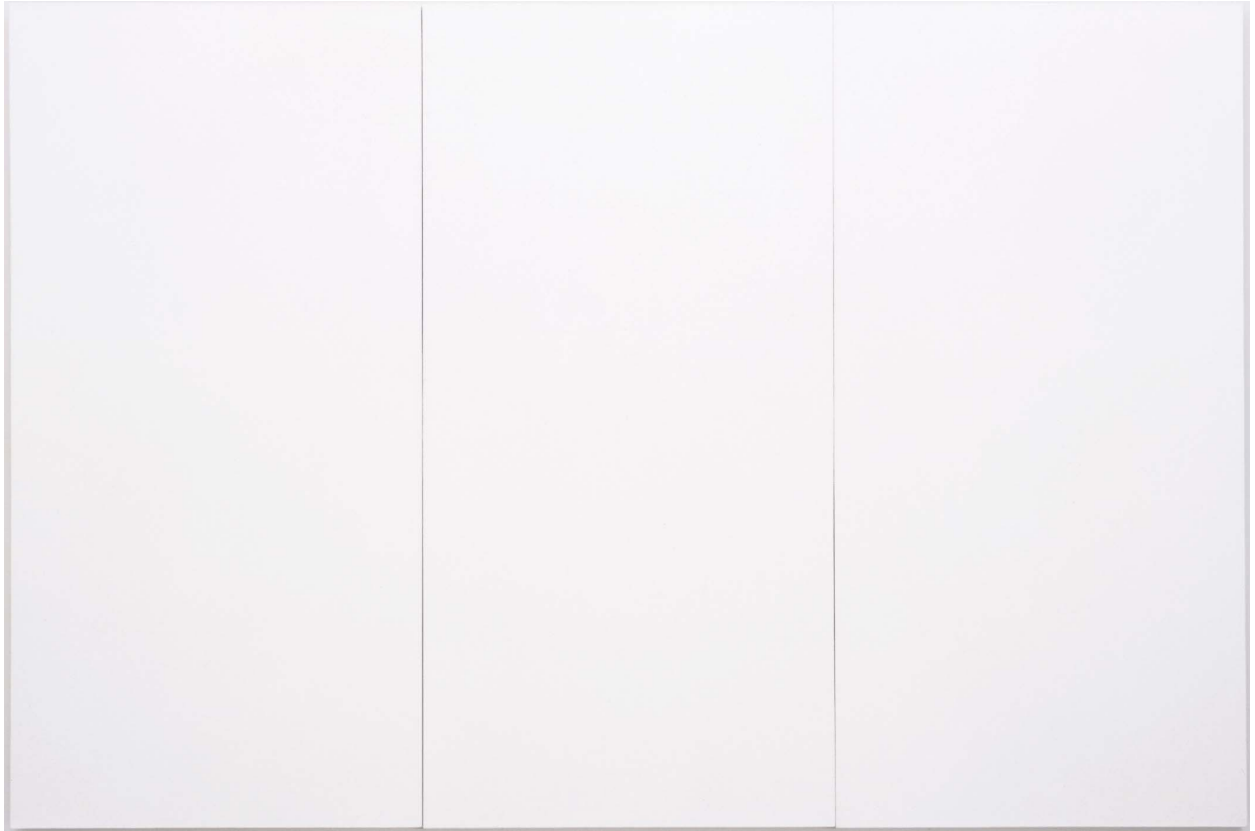
"Self Portrait: You and I" (Detail)

Plate 3



“Self Portrait: You and I” (Detail)

Plate 4



Robert Rauschenberg "White Painting" (1951)

I
TACET
II
TACET
III
TACET

NOTE: The title of this work is the total length in minutes and seconds of its performance. At Woodstock, N.Y., August 29, 1952, the title was 4' 33" and the three parts were 33", 2' 40", and 1' 20". It was performed by David Tudor, pianist, who indicated the beginnings of parts by closing, the endings by opening, the keyboard lid. However, the work may be performed by any instrumentalist or combination of instrumentalists and last any length of time.

THE MOVEMENTS MAY

AFTER THE WOODSTOCK PERFORMANCE A COPY IN PROPORTIONAL
NOTATION WAS MADE FOR IRWIN KREMER. IN IT THE TIMELENGTHS
FOR IRWIN KREMER JOHN CAGE
OF THE MOVEMENTS WERE 30" 2'23" and 1'40". IF

30"
223
140

112
112
224

677
COPYRIGHT © 1960 BY ARTHUR PRESS INC., 373 PARK AVE. SO., NYC 16 NY

John Cage "4'33'" (1952)

Plate 6



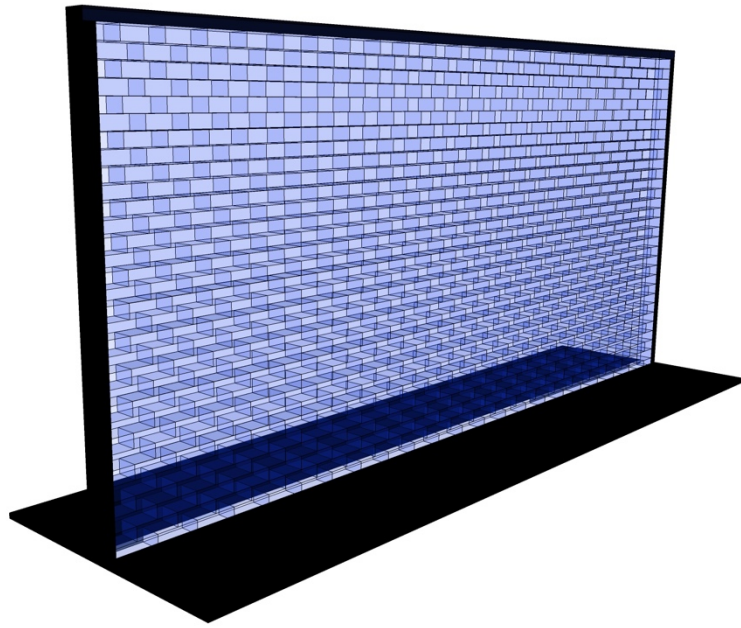
“Self Portrait: You and I” (Front $\frac{3}{4}$ View)



“Self Portrait: You and I” (Detail)



Protest Demonstration - Denver, Colorado 2016



3D model rendering



Casting process – UH Mānoa



“Self Portrait: You and I” (Installation View)



Richard Serra "Tilted Arc" 1981

Plate 13



Pae White “Qwalala” 2015

Plate 14



Maria Taniguchi "Untitled" 2014



Robert Flowers "Untitled" 2016

Product Information Silicone Sealants

DOW CORNING

Dow Corning® 1199 Silicone Glazing Sealant

FEATURES

- Fast cure
- Outstanding adhesion to wood, vinyl, fiberglass, aluminum, and glass window components
- Excellent weather resistance against sunlight, rain, snow, and temperature extremes (-40°C/-40°F to 149°C/300°F)
- 18-month shelf life from date of manufacture
- 10 standard colors as well as color-matched colors available
- AAMA certified

COMPOSITION

- One-part, neutral-cure RTV sealant

Fast-cure, one-part sealant ideal for automated glazing systems

APPLICATIONS

- The fast-cure nature of *Dow Corning*® 1199 Silicone Glazing Sealant makes it ideally suited for automated glazing systems, resulting in improved throughput and productivity. Because of its outstanding adhesion, the product is excellent for use as a backbedding sealant on sash, as well as cap, toe, or heel bead applications.

TYPICAL PROPERTIES

Specification Writers: These values are not intended for use in preparing specifications. Please contact your local Dow Corning sales office or your Global Dow Corning Connection before writing specifications on this product.

| Test* | Property | Unit | Result |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| As Supplied – Uncured | | | |
| CTM ¹ 0097 | Specific Gravity | | 1.02 |
| CTM 0098 | Working (Skin-Over) Time | minutes | 4 – 7 |
| ASTM D 2377 | Tack-Free Time | minutes | 20 – 30 |
| CTM 0663 | Deep Section Cure, after 24 hours | inches (mm) | 0.120 (3.0) |
| CTM 0364 | Extrusion Rate | grams/minute | 200 – 350 |
| ASTM D 2202 | Flow/Sag (Slump) | inches (mm) | <0.2 (<5.1) |
| As Cured – After 7 Days at 24°C (75°F) and 50 Percent Relative Humidity | | | |
| ASTM C 661 | Durometer, Shore A | points | 23 |
| ASTM D 412 | Tensile Strength | psi | 180 |
| ASTM D 412 | Elongation | percent | 600 |
| ASTM D 412 | 100% Modulus | psi (MPa) | 50 (0.34) |
| ASTM C 719 | Movement Capability | percent | ±25 |
| ASTM C 793 | UV Resistance, 10,000 hours QUV | | Excellent |

*CTM: Corporate Test Methods Copies of CTMs are available upon request.

ASTM: American Society for Testing and Materials.

¹CTM corresponds to standard ASTM tests in most instances.

DESCRIPTION

Dow Corning 1199 Silicone Glazing Sealant is a one-part, neutral-cure RTV sealant specially formulated to meet the demanding requirements as a backbedding sealant for the high-speed manufacturing of windows and doors. Designed for aggressive adhesion to wood, vinyl, fiberglass, aluminum, and glass, *Dow Corning* 1199 Silicone Glazing Sealant will provide years of worry-free performance against rain, sun, and temperature extremes.

Dow Corning 1199 Silicone Glazing Sealant is available in clear, white, bronze, beige, light bronze, gray, black, sand beige, forest green, and blue/white. Custom-matched colors are available.

Approvals/Specifications

ASTM C 920, Type S, Grade NS, Class 25, Use NT, G and A.

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